Article - Natural Resources

§5–102.

(a)   The General Assembly finds that:

(1)   Forests, streams, valleys, wetlands, parks, and scenic, historic, and recreation areas of the State are basic assets and their proper use, development, and preservation are necessary to protect and promote the health, safety, economy, and general welfare of the people of the State;

(2)   Enhancing the extent and condition of tree and forest cover in the Chesapeake Bay watershed is critical to the success in restoring the Chesapeake Bay because forests are the most beneficial use of protecting water quality due to their ability to capture, filter, and retain water, as well as absorb pollution from the air;

(3)   Forests and trees are key indicators of climate change and can mitigate greenhouse gas emissions by carbon sequestration;

(4)   Forests provide habitat for hundreds of wildlife species, including habitat needed for rare, threatened, and endangered species;

(5)   Forests are susceptible to environmental degradation caused by natural threats;

(6)   Forests, like other open space areas, are under intense development–related pressures for residential, commercial, and industrial conversion due to the demands of a growing population;

(7)   Trees and forests in urban areas provide multiple benefits, including:

(i)   Mitigation of urban stormwater runoff into the Chesapeake Bay;

(ii)   Sequestration of carbon;

(iii)   Avoidance of energy–related emissions;

(iv)   Mitigation of air pollutants, such as ozone and particulate matter;

(v)   Reduction of the urban heat island effect; and

(vi)   Contributions to community livability;

(8)   Forest land owners, including local government officials responsible for overseeing the management of publicly owned forest lands, could benefit from research–based education outreach programs in order to help facilitate an understanding of sustainable forestry management that is consistent with forest stewardship principles;

(9)   Forests are a renewable resource that help the State meet its renewable energy goals that are consistent with the State's:

(i)   Green power goal for State facilities;

(ii)   Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard;

(iii)   Healthy Air Act; and

(iv)   Maryland Clean Energy Incentive Act of 2006; and

(10)   This title sets forth Maryland's vision for sustaining Maryland's coveted forest lands into the 21st century that is consistent with the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement and the 2007 Forestry Conservation Initiative.

(b)   It is the policy of the State to encourage the retention and sustainable management of forest lands by:

(1)   Achieving no net loss of forest;

(2)   Affording due consideration to the protection and retention of forests in the State through existing land conservation programs where they have the highest value in terms of promoting the State's compliance with its clean water goals under the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement and the 2007 Forestry Conservation Initiative;

(3)   Enhancing the retention of privately owned forest lands through research–based educational outreach efforts to landowners by the State's forest conservancy district boards;

(4)   Developing financial incentives to encourage landowners to retain and manage their forests sustainably and in a manner that is consistent with a forest stewardship plan;

(5)   Promoting renewable energy policies and markets with increased emphasis on the use of in–State produced woody biomass;

(6)   Ensuring dual certification of the State's forests by the Forest Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative;

(7)   Recognizing the importance of:

(i)   A viable forest products industry to the economies of rural Maryland;

(ii)   Continued development of fiber products; and

(iii)   Maryland's green infrastructure; and

(8)   Developing and enhancing programs with a sustainable forestry component, including a forest mitigation banking system, a carbon credit or carbon sequestration program, a clean water credit trading system, an environmental services credit trading program, and a renewable energy credit trading system.